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REVIEWS AND NOTES.

POVERTY'S DEATH-RATE.

On page 64 of his interesting report on the negroes in the United States, Professor W. F. Willcox shows that the death-rate among negroes in the "registration area" of the United States in 1900 was 30.2, and of the white population 17.3; and in explanation of these figures he states,—

"The main inference derived from these figures—namely, that the non-Caucasian race has a very much higher death-rate than the white—may probably be accepted as correct."

As a simple restatement of the figures quoted above, the assertion is undoubtedly true. If, however, it be taken as an effort at causative interpretation,—*i.e.*, that the high death-rate of the American negro is a trait of the negro race,—it is open to serious criticism, and requires various qualifications, of which Professor Willcox himself is perfectly conscious. Many other conditions besides race affect the death-rate, and Professor Willcox makes an effort to eliminate some of them, as the influence of sex distribution and age distribution. At best, however, the differences of age distribution in various race groups can be but slight, as is shown by the following table in the report:—

PER CENT. OF POPULATION IN SPECIFIED AGE PERIOD: 1900.

	Under 5 years.	5-64.	65 years and over.	Unknown.
The registration area:				
Negro, Indian, and Mongolian	8.2	88.4	2.7	0.7
White	10.3	85.0	4.5	0.2

A much more important influence, however, is that of occupation upon death-rate. And the differences between the races in the distribution by occupations are much more marked than the differences of sex or even age distribution. The data can be readily found in the study of Professor Willcox:—

MAIN OCCUPATIONS OF NEGRO PERSONS OVER TEN YEARS OF AGE,
COMPARED WITH OCCUPATIONS OF WHITE PERSONS.

Occupation.	Negro.		White.	
	Number.	Per cent.	Number.	Per cent.
Agricultural laborers	1,344,125	33.7	3,041,003	12.1
Farmers, etc.	757,822	19.0	4,894,281	19.5
Laborers (not specified)	545,935	13.7	2,066,145	8.3
Servants and waiters	465,734	11.7	1,078,755	4.3
Laundrerers and laundresses . .	220,104	5.5	139,809	0.6
Other	658,617	16.4	13,815,734	55.2
	3,992,337	100.	25,035,727	100.

The five occupations which claim about 84 per cent. of the negroes employ only 45 per cent. of the white people; and if the class of farmers be excluded, which is proportionately equal in both races, the difference becomes still more striking. Four occupations utilize 65 per cent. of all the negroes employed, and only 25 per cent. of all white people employed. On the one hand, we have a group consisting mainly of wage-workers of the lowest strata, on the other a composite group of prosperous farmers, professional people, merchants, manufacturers, and a million and a half of highly paid union workers.

It is true that the occupations of agricultural laborers and servants are not classified among those with high death-rate, but the laborers (not specified) and laundresses are in a much less favored position in regard to the death-rate. The difficulty of an unqualified comparison in view of these differences is evident.

All this is, however, in the nature of an introduction. I wish to emphasize one factor of death-rate; namely, the general level of economic prosperity or poverty. That poverty has some effect in increasing the death-rate will be admitted in a general way by many statisticians (though the statement may not infrequently be met that frugality, which necessarily accompanies poverty, is more conducive to health and longevity than the luxurious habits of the rich); but, in view of the impossibility of measuring this influence, it is usually entirely disregarded. Statisticians who have been interested in the interrelation of vital and economic statistics will readily see how interesting and valuable some such measurement would be.

In my professional work I have quite accidentally found data

which seem to throw considerable light upon this interesting problem. It is true that the data have been found in Russian statistical literature, and refer to Russian conditions. Yet, distant as Russia is from our own land, the difference is not so great as an American is likely to think; for the condition, history, and mode of life of the Russian peasant have many points of resemblance to the condition and life of the American negro.

First, a few words as to the nature of the source. It is a series of statistical investigations of the rural economy of several districts of one province (or *gubernia*, usually translated as government) in the central part of Russia, that of Voronezh. The work has been done by the "zemstvo statistical committee" (*i.e.*, by the local statistical office) supported by the organs of local self-government,—the "zemstvos" of which the American public has heard so much during the last few months. The particular statistical office is in charge of Mr. F. Shcherbina, one of the ablest and most ingenious Russian agricultural statisticians, with whose methods it would be well for our professional statisticians to be acquainted. The general method of these statistical investigations is a house-to-house census, performed by very careful and trained statisticians. The time of the investigation is 1891. The reports were published in 1892 and 1893. The data in regard to the number of deaths were obtained by direct inquiry, and refer to the three preceding years, 1889–1891. It may be added that death and burial in Russia are accompanied with such complex ceremonies, that the cases where the occurrence of a death in a family within three years has been forgotten must be very few, indeed. The peasant households are classified by the amount of land they possess, either by allotment from the village or by purchase. A dessiatine is equal to 2.6997 acres, or, briefly, to 2.7 acres.

With these explanatory notes the following five tabular statements will speak for themselves. It should be added that the original reports give only the number of deaths for three years. The death-rate has not been calculated there, and no comments are made in regard to it. A bias is therefore not to be thought of. The necessary calculations have been made by the writer of these lines.

DEATH-RATE AMONG PEASANTS OF GOVERNMENT OF VORONEZH, 1889-91.

Peasant Households owning.		House- holds.	Popu- lation.	Deaths in 3 years.	Deaths in 1 year.	Death- rate.
Dessiatines.	Acres.					
District of Pavlov:						
0	0	1,012	3,483	380	126.7	36.4
Less than 5	Less than 13.5	6,199	31,568	3,402	1,134.0	35.3
5-15	13.5-40.5	8,338	53,917	5,202	1,734.0	32.2
15-25	40.5-67.5	3,255	29,103	2,669	889.7	30.6
25-50	67.5-135	1,462	20,464	1,653	551.0	27.0
50 and more	135 and more	88	2,068	129	43.0	20.8
Total	—	20,354	140,603	13,433	4,478.3	31.9
District of Bobrov:						
0	0	1,248	3,942	311	103.7	26.3
Less than 5	Less than 13.5	12,499	63,421	5,111	1,703.7	26.6
5-15	13.5-40.5	17,824	116,873	9,183	3,061.0	26.2
15-25	40.5-67.5	5,110	51,339	3,329	1,109.7	21.6
25-50	67.5-135	1,212	18,008	1,069	356.3	19.8
50 and more	135 and more	67	1,169	61	20.3	17.4
Total	—	37,960	254,752	19,064	6,354.7	24.9
District of Boruchensk:						
0	0	1,497	6,033	763	254.3	42.1
Less than 5	Less than 13.5	9,843	54,071	6,500	2,166.7	40.1
5-15	13.5-40.5	13,487	101,578	11,258	3,752.6	36.9
15-25	40.5-67.5	2,144	21,321	2,058	686.0	32.2
25-50	67.5-135	625	7,736	660	220.0	28.2
50 and more	135 and more	57	825	65	21.7	26.3
Total	—	27,653	191,564	21,304	7,101.3	37.1
District of Novokhopersk:						
0	0	1,146	3,712	333	111.0	29.9
Less than 5	Less than 13.5	4,693	21,300	1,690	563.3	26.4
5-15	13.5-40.5	11,431	71,899	5,444	1,814.7	25.2
15-25	40.5-67.5	4,804	44,491	3,082	1,027.3	23.1
25-50	67.5-135	1,735	22,942	1,433	477.7	20.8
50 and more	135 and more	141	2,470	136	45.3	18.3
Total	—	23,950	166,814	12,118	4,039.3	24.2
Four districts combined:						
0	0	4,903	17,170	1,787	595.7	34.7
Less than 5	Less than 13.5	33,234	170,360	16,703	5,567.7	32.7
5-15	13.5-40.5	51,080	344,267	31,087	10,362.3	30.1
15-25	40.5-67.5	15,313	146,254	11,138	3,712.7	25.4
25-50	67.5-135	5,034	69,150	4,815	1,605.0	23.1
50 and more	135 and more	353	6,532	391	130.3	19.2
Total	—	109,917	753,733	65,921	21,973.7	29.2

The important feature of this table may be restated here more compactly:—

Classes of Households.	DEATH-RATE.*				
	1st District.	2d District.	3d District.	4th District.	All 4 Districts.
Having no land	36.4	26.3	42.1	29.9	34.7
“ less than 13.5 acres . .	35.4	26.6	40.1	26.4	32.7
“ 13.5–40.5 acres . . .	32.2	26.2	36.9	25.2	30.1
“ 40.5–67.5 “	30.6	21.6	32.2	23.1	25.4
“ 67.5–135 “	27.0	19.8	28.2	20.8	23.1
“ more than 135 acres . .	20.8	17.4	26.3	18.3	19.2
All	31.7	24.9	37.1	24.2	29.2

The tables, then, refer to one occupation group. These are all farmers, all doing very much the same kind of work and living the same kind of life, except that the richer groups naturally consume more plentiful and more varied food. They also consume larger quantities of alcoholic spirits, which can hardly be expected to prolong longevity. Yet, without making any effort to explain the different death-rate by the specific physiologic causes, there it is, the most remarkable difference, evident in each case without a single exception.

It will be noticed how much the death-rates of different localities differ, though they are located in the same government. There evidently are various climatic causes which affect the death-rate, as well as variable conditions of the harvest. But in each case the effect of the economic condition is unmistakable.

Text-books of statistics never fail to indicate the enormous death-rate in Russia. Many explanations are given of it; and, were the Russian skin of a different hue, the racial explanation would certainly claim a well-deserved prominence. The tables give the only true explanation of this excessive death-rate; for, given the Russian

* Statistical accuracy is not claimed for these death-rates beyond the point of its decrease with the increase of the farm. The death of three years, 1889–91, has been calculated by comparison with the population of 1891, which is, of course, a very crude method, as population was gradually increasing. If it were possible to calculate the death-rate for each one of the three years and average them, the rate, undoubtedly, would have been higher all along the line, since the average of population would have been smaller. However, this would not affect the general argument any; and it was not thought necessary to introduce complicated statistical niceties, since only the general tendency was important.

peasant with a reasonable amount of land, the death-rate drops down to the ordinary European level.

May not one ask himself what the conclusions would be if a similar investigation were made into the condition of the American negro? May not one express the wish that some such investigation be undertaken by some one fit for the work and free from all prejudices against the negro? The scientific results will undoubtedly repay any amount of labor or expense.

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COMMENT ON THE METHOD OF MEASURING CONCENTRATION OF WEALTH.

The method of measuring concentration of wealth has recently been discussed in this journal by Mr. M. O. Lorenz in an article in the June number and by Mr. G. K. Holmes in a reply to criticism in the September number, 1905. In this connection the following remarks have occurred to the writer.

In considering this question, the fundamental point to be kept in mind is that concentration is a fact of relation. Hence *the quantities to be measured are relative*.

The use for comparative purposes of income classes bounded at fixed and absolute amounts is, therefore, misleading. In comparing two points of time fifty years apart, the "middle" class, as thus defined by absolute size of income, may, at the second date, be relatively lower in the scale than at the earlier date. It may then appear to have gained upon the other classes, particularly upon a next lower class that was large at the first date, when there was, in fact, no change in *relative* incomes or even a change in the direction of concentration.

This point may best be illustrated graphically. If we assume that the great majority of incomes treated are incomes of families or of heads of families, then the base of the "income pyramid" is not at zero, but at the point where the income is sufficient barely to maintain a family. The "pyramid," as regards income from labor, is superposed upon an approximately rectangular block, as in Fig. 1. The pyramid of all incomes is composite, made up of incomes from property as well as from labor. The pyramid of income from property is greatly elongated, as in Fig. 2. That of income from labor is much broader at the base, and does not rise so high. The two pyramids